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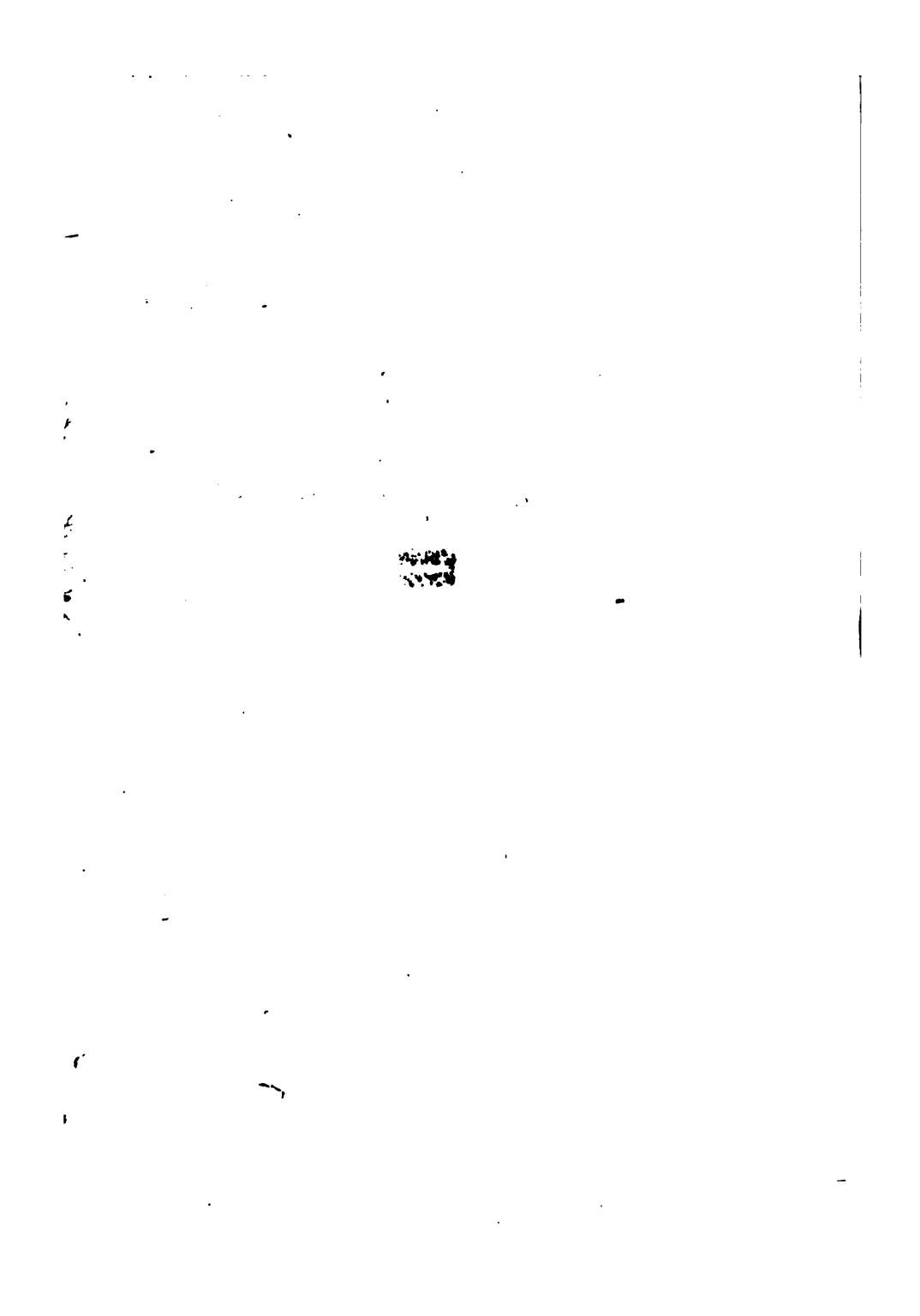
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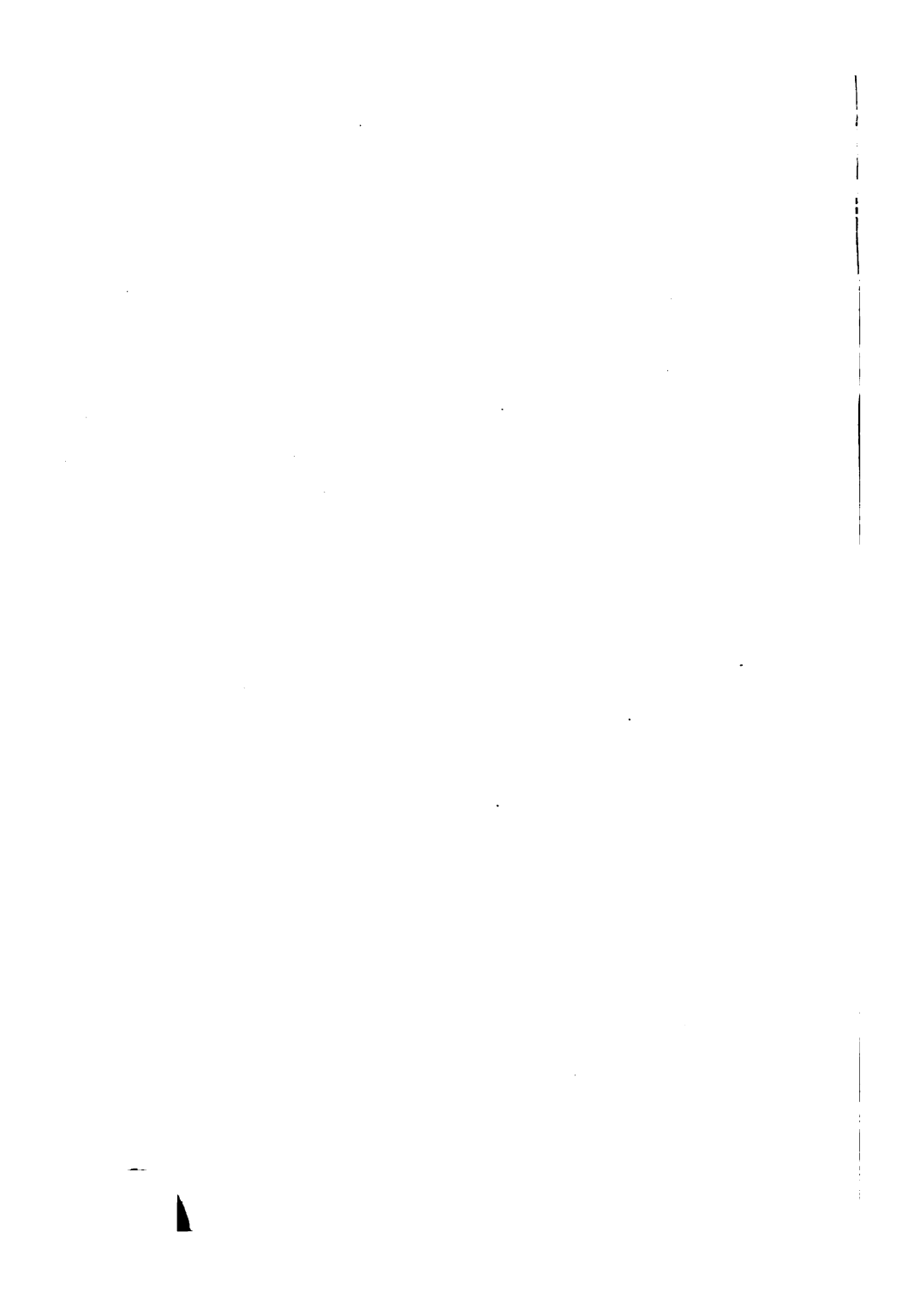
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**Books and How to Make the
Most of Them**

BY

JAMES HOSMER PENNIMAN
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C. W. BARDEEN, PUBLISHER
SYRACUSE, N. Y.

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There is probably no subject on which there has been more advice given than on that of books and reading, but there are few upon which advice is more necessary, for even so wise a man as Goethe said, "I have been fifty years trying to learn how to read, and I have not learned yet."

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TO THE
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CONTENTS

I. The Miracle of Books.....	9
II. How to Use Books,	18
III. Cultivating the Memory.....	26
IV. What to Read and the Abuse of Books	31
V. The Art of Reading.....	40
VI. Classification of Books.....	54
VII. Poetry	62
VIII. Biography	70
IX. History	77
X. Fiction	85
XI. Libraries and the Care of Books.	91

Books and How to Make the Most of Them

CHAPTER I.

THE MIRACLE OF BOOKS.

A book is a miracle wrought by human agency. What more wonderful than that the thought of a lifetime should be made visible and concentrated so as to be carried in the pocket; that black lines and dots upon a white page should bring before our minds the most beautiful images. More remarkable than the telegraph or the telephone, a book not only annihilates space but time, and carries the voice of David or Homer across the seas of the ages.

The miracle of the widow's cruse finds its literal realization in a book. We may take all we can from it but there is just as much left for others with the sole limitation that he gets the most from books who has the most knowledge; to him that hath is given.

TO VIBU ALPHORILLAO

10 *How to Make the Most of Books*

No other property is so peculiarly our own as our intellectual possessions. They are always with us; no reversal of fortune can deprive us of them. If we share our knowledge with another we still have it, and perhaps in a more orderly and useful form as the result of contact with a different mind, and the belief in the immortality of the soul makes us sure that our mental acquisitions are taken with us beyond the grave. Education and culture would be of small value if they were to be terminated by the expiration of a few short years of life. Books are the only work of man that may be said to be omniscient. They are the stored-up memory of the race. As all our experience of life would vanish without memory, so all accurate knowledge of mankind would evaporate without books and we should have nothing to depend upon but tradition.

Without books we should know nothing of the workings of the mighty minds of Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare or Milton. Without them Caesar, Napoleon and Washington would be traditions. We can get but an imperfect idea of the

history of our country except from books. Books alone make books possible, and nothing is more rare than a book which does not depend for its material on other books.

Books stereotype and petrify language so that while the spoken word is volatile and changeable we find in books the very words in which we took delight years ago. We may cause to pass through our minds the same thoughts in absolutely the same language that interested Dr. Johnson or Milton; we may even follow out the mental processes of Plato or Aristotle, and see what they enjoyed and note what they thought.

Books intensify thought; a book is better than conversation in that it may be brooded over; revised, extended, polished and continued from time to time, but it cannot answer questions except those anticipated by its author. A writer will put into a book thoughts that he would not or could not express in conversation, and through his books we may know intimately a man who was known only superficially by his most familiar contemporaries.

12 *How to Make the Most of Books*

Books not only acquaint us with the thoughts of the great men of the past but they enable us to make permanent our own thoughts, so that if our ideas are worthy of being perpetuated those who live centuries hence may be as familiar with our minds as we are with the minds of Milton or Dante. A book enables the thought of one man to reach all other inquiring men in ages to come. Men of whom their world was not worthy have gained late recognition through their books; men whose minds were far in advance of their time have handed down their thoughts in books which have at last found appreciative readers.

The printing press has multiplied enormously our means of giving currency to ideas, but thought is no more powerful now than in the time of Plato or Aristotle. Men like these wrote books before the time of Christ which are still consulted on the subjects of which they treat. Many of the problems of life and death are as mysterious to us as they were to them.

Better than any other relics the books of a nation show what it really was.

The Dark Ages are called so because few books were written in them, and Africa is the Dark Continent because it has no literature.

No other works of man have done so much to spiritualize the race as books. The Laocoon is not as inspiring a creation as the *Iliad*, the Cologne Cathedral is not as civilizing as Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and it has been said that the works of Goethe have advanced the progress of mankind more than all the conquests of Napoleon. Books have more soul than any other human work. A house without books is as dark as a house without windows.

Literature is the most enduring of the fine arts. No painter, sculptor, or architect has erected so permanent a memorial as the poets have done. Statues may be broken, pictures may fade or be consumed by fire, even the pyramids may crumble away, but the thought contained in great books such as the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* is more nearly eternal than marble or bronze. Lowell's *Commemoration Ode* forms a more durable monument to Harvard's dead heroes than

14 *How to Make the Most of Books*

Memorial Hall. There have been other actions as fine as the charge of the Light Brigade, but it is only those that the great poets have sung that are truly immortal in our memories.

“For deeds doe die, however noblie donne,
And thoughts doe as themselves decay;
But wise words, taught in numbers for to
runne,

Recorded by the Muses live for ay.”


—*Spenser.*

Among the most lasting works of men are mosaics; they are not easily broken, their colors do not fade and their outlines do not grow dim with time. In the museum of the Capitol at Rome is the famous mosaic of Pliny's doves, rendered familiar by so many copies: three or four doves perched on a broad-brimmed cup, absolutely as perfect in form and tint as when Pliny saw them two thousand years ago. Yet these tiny bits of stone joined by cement are not as permanent as the poems of Homer which have as much human interest to-day as they had when Alexander read them

in the intervals of his pursuit of the Persians.

The plays of Shakespeare will last as long as the earth remains, and he said, "Not marble, nor the gilded monuments Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme."

The love of great books is in itself a mark of greatness. Biography teaches no more practical lesson than this; that the world's really noble men have spent little time in reading any books but the best, and that there has been a general agreement among them as to what the best books are. Socrates was familiar with Homer and Aesop. Alexander slept with Homer under his pillow. Montaigne alludes constantly to the *Bible* and to Cicero, Virgil, Horace, Seneca, Ovid and other classical authors. Bacon makes frequent quotations from the *Bible* and also shows a knowledge of Aesop, Cicero, Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, Montaigne and other great writers. Emerson notes the fact that Montaigne was in the libraries of Shakespeare and of Ben Jonson. Emer-



16 *How to Make the Most of Books*

son read Chaucer, Montaigne, Plutarch and Plato while at college and knew Shakespeare almost by heart.

When we realize how few books the men of antiquity had we understand that they were *obliged* to read not many things but much. Homer probably had no books at all. Socrates had very few and even Cicero, the accomplished scholar, few in comparison with a modern library. He never read Dante or Milton or Shakespeare.

The habit of communing with great thoughts gives health and vigor to the mind. Men who habitually read the classics have a breadth of view and a toughness of mental fibre which cannot be obtained by those whose highest inspiration is derived from the newspaper and the last novel. Reading the best books gives an elevation of thought which raises above the level of common things, ennobles and makes fine the ordinary daily occupations, dignifies life and makes it worth living. The woman who keeps her *Bible* open while she is sewing and refreshes herself with the *Psalms* or the *Gospels* is deriving mental as well

as spiritual nourishment; without such inspiration her labor would fade into the light of common day.

We need great books to take us out of ourselves, and to show us in true perspective our relations to the past, the present and the future. We may find from books if we have not learned from our own observation the true heroism that is present in the pain and poverty and distress of everyday life. "Books," said Emerson, "impart sympathetic activity to the moral powers. Go with mean people and you think life is mean. Then read Plutarch, and the world is a proud place, peopled with men of positive quality, with heroes and demigods standing around us, who will not let us sleep." Michael Angelo said "When I read Homer I look to see if I am not twenty feet tall."

CHAPTER II.

THE USE OF BOOKS.

"He that shall make search after knowledge, let him seek it where it is," said Montaigne of books.

Whatever your purpose, books will help you to accomplish it. They make the knowledge of mankind our own if we know how to avail ourselves of them. Only the wise can get the best out of books, they refuse to deliver their message to the ignorant.

Next to knowing a thing yourself the most necessary thing is knowing where to find it, and the method of getting at the information which is stored in books is an art that must be acquired.

It is an education to take up some subject and master it, examining all the books about it and weighing all the varying and conflicting opinions. You never realize the depth of human knowledge and the difficulty of judging what the truth is, until you have found out from

your own experience the infinite labor of mastering one small division of one subject.

From catalogues and bibliographies you may make a list of the best works on the subject that you are investigating and you must then quarry from these books what is of use to you and arrange it in a logical and orderly way.

You need not read all the books; some contain what you already know, and in many of them there is repetition of what you have seen elsewhere. You glance through one and find little to the purpose, the table of contents of another shows that here and there is matter that should be looked over, at last you come to a work by a great man, a master of the subject, every word of which must be read and pondered on.

From these books you obtain references to others that you did not know of; judgment must be shown in concentrating yourself on what is of real value, and in not going out of your way to explore alluring but useless by-paths. When you take many notes in blank books it is difficult to refer to them unless you have

an index, the making and use of which requires time, but notes taken on one side of sheets of loose paper may easily be sorted into large envelopes according to the divisions of the subject, and as your investigations proceed and your knowledge widens new divisions may readily be made. There is a decided advantage in having all the notes of a kind together and when they are on separate pieces of paper they may be pasted or pinned in strips and their order changed at will. You may not have your note book with you but a bit of blank paper can always be obtained. These notes may be a word or two here to remind you of an idea, a quotation there, accurately copied, and, most important of all, such original thoughts as have occurred to you. You will strengthen your mind and also improve your diction, by writing out fully the ideas that occur to you while reading. When you do this, you will not read so many books, but you will derive infinitely more good from those you do read. You will pay more attention and will be careful that what you read is worth noting.

Take notes freely and as much as possible in your own language. "Writing maketh an exact man." According to Dr. Watts, more is gained by writing out once than by reading five times. What you have taken notes of is thereby fixed in your mind and when you have classified your subject according to its natural divisions you have, in so doing, formed new associations which will help you to remember it.

When your materials are collected and arranged, your work is half done. What remains requires a mental faculty of a higher order:—the power of coördination.

Just here the difference appears between a penny-a-liner and the author of a book of permanent value. Both men may be industrious, both may have good ideas, but the author has a breadth of mind which enables him to coördinate his knowledge; he pursues a connected chain of thought leading to definite conclusions, he has assimilated what he has found in books, reinforced it by his own observation and study, and the result is a compact

22 *How to Make the Most of Books*

and organic whole, a material addition to the knowledge of the world.

In the *Fable for Critics*, Lowell thus describes the unorderedly worker among books:—

“‘Twould be endless to tell you the things
that he knew,
All separate facts, undeniably true,
But with him or each other they'd nothing
to do,
No power of combining, arranging, discerning,
Digested the masses he learned into
learning.”

Try to see clearly the important divisions of a subject, to be fair minded, to draw your own conclusions, to distinguish between the probable and the improbable, to recognize the good points in each side of conflicting theories. Especially learn to classify and arrange the ideas you get from books and to unite them to what you already know.

If you can enjoy the study of some special subject connected with your occupation and keep at it long enough to make yourself master of it, you may

by so doing educate yourself. You should not only study the actual operations, but you should also familiarize yourself with what has been written about them, and should make an effort to record a permanent advance made by your own exertions.

"Knowledge of books in a man of business, is as a torch in the hands of one who is willing and able to show those who are bewildered the way which leads to prosperity and welfare," says the *Spectator*. How much, for example, has been lost in treasure and energy because politicians who have not read history and political economy, ignorantly persist in methods that have failed ever since the world began. "A prince without letters," said Ben Jonson, "is a pilot with out eyes. All his government is groping." "It is manifest that all government of action is to be gotten by knowledge, and knowledge, best, by gathering many knowledges, which is reading," wrote Sir Philip Sidney.

When you read a number of books on the same topic each throws light on the other and you get deeper, clearer ideas.

24 *How to Make the Most of Books*

You think more. One subject studied thoroughly has more educational value than many looked at superficially. But while there is the greatest culture value in taking up one line of thought and pursuing it as far as possible, the importance of the broad foundation to build on must always be kept before you. "What science and practical life alike need is not narrow men, but broad men sharpened to a point," says Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler.

There is no occupation where a fund of general information is not valuable, provided it be accurate. The knowledge of a little law is as useful to the doctor as that of a little medicine is to the lawyer.

How much more useful a man is in all branches of his calling if he knows thoroughly at least one part of it. You cannot do anything that will add more to your value to yourself and to the world in general than to study your occupation all your life. If your work as a student ends with school or college, your usefulness will be limited and you will always occupy a subordinate position.

Education is a life work, we have no time to waste, but we should take time

enough to do it well. Be satisfied with a slow advance if you are getting ahead all the time, but do not be turned aside from the track.

Do not make the mistake of supposing that converse with the thoughts of men as preserved in books can take the place of communion with living men. You will get warped and unreal ideas of life if you do. Talk about what you read with intellectual people. We are educated by association with men, by pictures, by music, by nature as well as by the study of books. Commune with other men but do not omit to commune with yourself, only by so doing can you gain "that final and higher product of knowledge which we call wisdom." "Read to weigh and consider," said Bacon, that means to think. Wordsworth speaks of "knowledge purchased with the loss of power," and Huxley says, "the great end of life is not knowledge but action. What men need is, as much knowledge as they can assimilate and organize into a basis for action; give them more and it may become injurious."

CHAPTER III.

CULTIVATING THE MEMORY.

Most of us forget, as Andrew Lang says, "with an ease and readiness only to be acquired by practice," and would agree with Montaigne that "if I be a man of some reading, yet I am a man of no remembering."

To recall what we read we must first of all pay attention to it. Attention has been styled the mother of memory. It is naturally united to interest, we attend best to what we care most about, but we may watch over our minds and force them to return when they wander and attention may be made habitual by repeated and vigorous efforts of the will.

"There must be continuity of work," says Thomas A. Edison, the inventor, "when you set out to do a certain thing never let anything disturb you from doing that. This power of putting the thought on one particular thing, and keeping it there for hours at time, comes from prac-

tice, and it takes a long while to get in the habit. I remember, a long while ago, I could only think ten minutes on a given subject before something else would come to my mind. But after long practice I can now keep my mind for hours on one topic without being distracted with thoughts of other matters."

On the other hand those who find difficulty in focusing the mind for long periods of time may be comforted by the following opinion of Professor William James than whom there is no better authority on matters of this kind: "The total mental efficiency of a man is the resultant of the working together of all his faculties. He is too complex a being for any one of them to have the casting vote. If any one of them do have the casting vote, it is more likely to be the strength of his desire and passion, the strength of the interest he takes in what is proposed; concentration, memory, reasoning power, inventiveness, excellence of the senses,—all are subsidiary to this. No matter how scatter-brained the type of a man's successive fields of consciousness may be, if he really *care* for a subject,

he will return to it incessantly from his incessant wanderings, and first, and last do more with it, and get more result from it, than another person whose attention may be more continuous during a given interval, but whose passion for the subject is of a more languid and less permanent sort."

We must have a clear idea of what we read if we wish to retain it. We cannot remember perfectly what we do not understand. We must think about what we read, assimilate it and unite it to the knowledge that we already possess. Every time we go over it in our minds we make the impression clearer.

Professor James lays special stress on the aid to memory that is derived by this association of ideas. "When we wish to fix a new thing in either our own mind or a pupil's, our conscious effort should not be so much to *impress* and *retain* it as to connect it with something else already there. The 'secret of a good memory' is thus the secret of forming diverse and multiple associations with every fact we care to retain. But this forming of associations with a fact—

what is it but thinking *about* the fact as much as possible? Briefly, then, of two men with the same outward experiences, *the one who thinks over his experiences most*, and weaves them into the most systematic relations with each other, will be the one with the best memory."

When we read a number of books on the same subject the memory is helped by the association of ideas, and on the other hand we have high authority for the statement that the memory is weakened by aimless reading. There is perhaps no one pursuit in which so much precious time is wasted, no one in which the energies of mankind are expended to so little purpose, as in such reading. "Nothing, in truth," says Dugald Stewart, "has such a tendency to weaken not only the powers of invention but the intellectual powers in general, as a habit of extensive and various reading without reflection."

The habit of sharing the results of reading is as useful to ourselves as it is to others. The scholar of whom Chaucer wrote "gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche," probably had no difficulty in remembering what he read.

The reproduction of what you have read by conversation or by writing aids the memory while strengthening the mind.

Faraday says, "I hold it as a great point in self-education that the student should be continually engaged in forming exact ideas, and in expressing them clearly by language." Professor James remarks, "a thing merely read or heard, and never verbally reproduced, contracts the weakest possible adhesion in the mind. Verbal recitation or reproduction is thus a highly important kind of re-active behavior on our impressions."

Moreover, while cultivating the memory, the reproduction of ideas from the works of writers like Addison, Newman, and Matthew Arnold is valuable in the formation of a clear and simple style. It was by careful reading of Addison and by afterwards reproducing the thought in his own language that Franklin when a boy formed the habit of elegant and exact expression that made whatever he wrote interesting.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT TO READ AND THE ABUSE OF BOOKS

Many people live in first-class houses stay at first-class hotels, travel in first-class steamships and railway trains and then read third or fourth-class books. For them one book is about as good as another.

If one does not care for the world's great books the fault is in him, not in them, but he must realize the vastness of human knowledge and understand that some of the wisest voices of all time have no message for him.

There are nomadic readers who read as the gypsies live, camping everywhere but for a night without purpose and without profit. Such reading is mental dissipation. Desultory reading jumps from one book to another. You might as well try to drink the sea as to read all books. You must divide in order to conquer. Do not read blindly, know what you are

32 *How to Make the Most of Books*

about. Have a definite aim and purpose. Do not read the first book that comes to hand but when you hear of a book that you ought to read make a note of it. By keeping a list of books you may shape your course and make your reading a selection from a selection.

Do not prefer the new to the meritorious; by following Emerson's advice "read no book until it has been out a year," you will avoid many loud-trumpeted books. There is uncertainty in reading a new book, but the value of the old books is well known. We need make no mistake.

Many of the oldest books are always new but there are books which were once standards on historical and technical subjects that are now as out of date as last year's almanac. Be sure that what you read is reliable and the best of its kind. Prefer quality to quantity. Read the great books for yourself and do not be content with reading other people's impressions of them. Books about books are seldom useful unless one has also read the works of which they treat.

Let the books that you select be those that have the approval of men competent to judge, but bear in mind that the wisest man cannot select the books that will best suit others; each must choose for himself. People are always glad to recommend the books that have helped them but they cannot tell whether such books will help you. You must find out for yourself, no one else can do it for you. Do not be afraid to ask anyone who knows more than you do. There is no information which people are so ready to give as about books, indeed when you ask them they feel flattered. When Franklin wished to make friends with a man that he suspected of hostile sentiments he borrowed a book of him and returned it promptly.

To find out what the best books are is no difficult matter, but to find out what are the best books for us requires a self-knowledge that takes life-long study. In reading we must feel our way, we cannot tell what is best for us all at once. We need to get acquainted with our own minds, to learn what our powers and tastes are. This takes time and thought

and, more than all, fair-mindedness in order that we may not form too high or too low an estimate of our abilities. "If thou wouldst profit by thy reading, read humbly, simply, honestly, and not desiring to win a character for learning," said Thomas a Kempis.

Have a clear view of literature, know what you like and why you like it. Be honest with yourself, do not pretend to like what you do not because other people do. Do not be afraid to be ignorant of many things, it is the price you must pay for knowing a few things well. It is only the stupid who pretend to know what they do not. An educated man is not ashamed to say that he does not know. "The acknowledgment of ignorance," said Montaigne, "is one of the best and surest testimonies of judgment that I can finde." To know when you do know a thing and when you do not, is the first step towards the attainment of sound scholarship, and the next is to know where to go for information. "Nothing is so prolific as a little known well."

To have a general idea of what is worth reading and to know where to turn for

the books which are of vital importance to one's development must be the foundation of any plan for culture. It is one of the most useful results of a liberal education that it gives a broad view of the whole range of human thought, and shows what to consider and what to reject; it teaches to distinguish as Lowell says between literature and printed matter.

Follow the bent of your inclination but make a clear distinction between the reading that you do with a purpose and that which you do for pleasure. "what we read with inclination makes a strong impression. What we read as a task is of little use," said Doctor Johnson, and he added "if we read without inclination, half the mind is employed in fixing the attention, so there is but one half to be employed on what we read."

Much energy is wasted by conscientious readers over classic books that are beyond their capacity. Plato and Aristotle are among the greatest thinkers that the world has produced but their works are not within the comprehension of every mind. Indeed Emerson says that,

"There are not in the world at any one time more than a dozen persons who read and understand Plato."

/ Do not think that because a statement is in print it is necessarily true. You will often find conflicting statements in different books on the same subject. "Some books are lies frae end to end," said Burns. Fortunately this can be said of few books but many contain inaccuracies, mis-statements and exaggerations. Weigh and consider all you read in the light of your own experience. Books like life of which they are expressions and authors who produce them are of all kinds, good and bad, uplifting and degrading, true and false. We must value them for what they are, not for what they pretend to be, and, setting aside our own preconceptions and prejudices, lay our minds open to those who seriously and sincerely hold other views than ours.

The author tries to make us feel what he feels and see what he sees. Some can do this without effort on our part and others like cuttle fish cover themselves with clouds of their own obscurity.

We soon learn from the way a writer expresses himself whether he is accurate or not and we depend upon those whom we find careful in making their statements.

— We get to love and trust authors as we get to know our friends by long and familiar converse. The writers we should know best, with whose lives and complete works we should make ourselves familiar are those who have beauty of character added to grace of expression. Some men like Burns and Goldsmith endear themselves to us in spite of pronounced weaknesses.

Books give pleasure not only by what they contain but also by the manner in which it is expressed. Beauty of language as well as of thought make the works of Cardinal Newman and Matthew Arnold attractive whether we agree with their conclusions or not and whether the subjects of which they treat are of interest to us or not.

Milton tells us that we should have a vigilant eye how books demean themselves. There is in some ways more danger from evil books than from evil companions. Bad companions cannot be with

us always and bad books may be. Schopenhauer calls, "bad books, those exuberant weeds of literature that choke the true corn," and even the gentle Charles Lamb speaks with contempt of "things in books' clothing." The only use of poor books is to teach us by comparison the value of good ones. Rousseau thought that "the abuse of reading is destructive to knowledge. Imagining ourselves to know everything we read, we conceive it unnecessary to learn it by other means."

"Literature is not shut up in books nor art in galleries: both are taken in by unconscious absorption through the finer pores of mind and character in the atmosphere of society," said Lowell; and Emerson wrote, "books are for the scholar's idle times: when he can read God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted in other men's transcripts of their readings/ But when the intervals of darkness come, as come they must,—when the sun is hid and the stars withdraw their shining,—we repair to the lamps which were kindled by their ray, to guide our steps to the East again, where the dawn is."

“No man should consider so highly of himself as to think he can receive but little light from books, nor so meanly as to believe he can discover nothing but what is to be learned from them.” wrote Doctor Johnson, and Professor Blackie says, “all knowledge which comes from books comes indirectly, by reflection, and by echo; true knowledge grows from a living root in the thinking soul; and whatever it may appropriate from without, it takes by living assimilation into a living organism, not by mere borrowing.”

CHAPTER V.

THE ART OF READING.

"The most important step toward getting mental power is the acquisition of a right method in work and a just standard of attainment," says President Elliot. The secret of success in reading is concentration. The mind must be focused like a lens on just those books and just those parts of them that are needed to accomplish the desired object. Have a definite purpose and do not allow yourself to be turned aside from it. There are those who read merely to get over a certain number of pages and say that they have read a book. Printed words run before their eyes and make no impression on their minds. In this age of hurry many rush through books as trains rush through tunnels.

The true reader makes his reading give an account of itself. After you have read a few pages stop and think it over and arrange it in your mind. It takes time to ripen, the best growth is slow.

We can no more become acquainted with a book on a single reading than we can know a man on a single meeting. "Between reading and study there is the same difference as between a guest and a friend," said St. Bernard. Ruskin thought that reading the same thing over and over again aided him greatly in getting thoroughly to the bottom of matters; and Dr. W. T. Harris has remarked, "it is my experience with great world poets that the first reading yields the smallest harvest. Each succeeding reading becomes more profitable in geometrical ratio. At first, Dante's *Divine Comedy* was a dumb show written over with hard, dogmatic inscriptions. It has become to me the most eloquent exposition of human freedom and divine grace."

Bacon tells us that books are to be read in different ways. Some are to be read here and there, others to be skimmed and a few to be studied. Be content with gradual progress, the best growth is slow, but keep constantly at it. Milton speaks of "industrious and select reading," and that is the only kind that gives true culture.

Says Walt Whitman, "the process of reading is not a half sleep, but in the highest sense, an exercise, a gymnastic struggle; that the reader is to do something for himself, must be on the alert, must himself or herself construct indeed the poem, argument, history, metaphysical essay—the text furnishing the hints, the clue, the start or framework."

"Men give me some credit for genius. All the genius I have lies in this: when I have a subject in hand I study it profoundly; day and night it is before me. I explore it in all its bearings. My mind becomes pervaded with it. Then the effort which I make the people are pleased to call the fruit of genius. It is the fruit of labor and thought."—*Daniel Webster*.

We must recognize the fact that there are many books of great value to others that have no message for us. We may waste time in reading good books that we do not understand. "It is of paramount importance," says Schopenhauer, "to acquire the art *not* to read."

Books should be ladders to lift us to a higher mental plane. No matter how

long or how industriously we read, we can never be elevated by trash. The more literature we ponder on and make our own the better we are for it, but the little thoughts of inferior men though they may serve to occupy our minds can never improve them. And on the other hand the habit of associating with the thoughts of noble men gives health and robustness to the mind, which does not grow unless it is exerted on something worthy of its strength.

The books that help us most are those which demand the exercise of our highest powers, books which have a clear and definite purpose and that appeal to the best that is in us. Such books are not to be understood all at once, but every time we re-read them we get new light upon them. We should not force ourselves to read what we do not understand, but should read the best that we can enjoy and if that is not the best there is, it will be in time if we persevere.

No other occupation is so well adapted to the profitable employment of moments of leisure as reading. At any place, at any time, without preparation we may

read. Books are always ready to do for us all that our mental state will admit. No man was ever so wretched that he could not claim and receive the companionship and sympathy of the best thought of the best men. No life is so cheerless that it cannot be brightened by books.

Doctor Johnson thought that the most miserable man is he who cannot read on a rainy day. How much those miss who have no love of reading, how time must hang heavily on their hands in illness, in bad weather, in the long evenings. Emerson liked to read and study in a tumultuous privacy of storm.

Reading is often the only pleasure of the sick, bringing to their rooms the heroes of all ages and the scenes of all climes so that they may forget their sufferings in sailing the ocean with Columbus, or leaving the smoke and turmoil of the city they may wander with Thoreau in leafy nooks by the crystal waters of Walden. Sitting in a poor room, ill-fed and ragged a man may entertain Sir Walter Scott or Lord Macaulay and dismiss them without ceremony when he tires of them. The fact that we can

stop the talk of a book at will is one of the greatest advantages of reading. Lord Macaulay might have bored one but his books never do.

Reading is the great solace of old age and is one of the few pleasures which increases as the years go by.

Life should be a happy medium between the practical and the ideal; those successful men of business who have no taste for literature often appreciate their deficiencies quite as much as do the impractical idealists who have never accomplished anything of real value. Darwin devoted his mental energies so entirely to the consideration of facts, that he lost all taste for imaginative literature and deeply regretted that his mind in this respect was warped and one sided.

There are, however, many men who have become so dulled by the practicalities of business that they consider it a waste of time to read anything but the newspapers or the reports of the stock market. The pleasure to be gotten from Shakespeare or Tennyson such persons will never know.

46 *How to Make the Most of Books*

Lack of time is made an excuse for superficial accomplishment, but no one is so busy that he cannot find time to read if he will but diligently make the most of his opportunities. "Dost thou value life," said Franklin, "then do not waste time for that is the stuff life is made of." "In studies whatsoever a man commandeth upon himself, let him set hours for it," says Bacon; but, he adds, "whatsoever is agreeable to his nature, let him take no care for any set hours, for his thoughts will fly to it of themselves."

A small fixed period devoted to study every day is far better than a longer time given occasionally. The result is not only greater but the mental effect is better. For by devoting a certain time every day to the consideration of noble thoughts your mind which grows by what it feeds on is given food for reflection so that it increases in power even when you are not reading.

There are books not only for all sorts and conditions of men but also for all the varying circumstances of the life of each and for all the different mental

phases through which they may pass. A book may have a message for every one but not the same message for each; one it may encourage, another it may rebuke; one it may lead further in the path he is treading, another it may stop and turn into a better way. Habits of thought due to inheritance or occupation modify and in some measure determine the effect of a book and the nature of its message for each reader.

You should adapt books to your mental state, after a hard day's work the mind easily wearies, while with the strength of the morning you may read the very best that you are capable of. Read the hardest book first and as your mind tires lay it aside and take up something easier. When you find that you are not appreciating what you read stop and give your mind a rest.

What we read depends upon our taste and taste determines character and is determined by character. Taste may be cultivated and improved by always preferring the higher to the lower when we have an opportunity to make a choice, by improving the surroundings and as-

sociations, by unconscious influence as well as by conscious effort. There is only one way in which a love for good literature may be gained and that is by reading good literature. People talk about the English classics and at last almost convince themselves that they are familiar with them but how many do you know who have really read Shakespeare?

There are constant allusions in literature and in life to books with which everyone is supposed to be acquainted, such as the *Bible*, *Homer*, *Shakespeare*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Scott* and *Longfellow*. One cannot always choose his business in life, sometimes he is forced to do the first thing that comes to hand, but he need not engage in any recreation that he does not choose and it is his own fault if his pleasures are mean ones. We often meet people whose minds seem flat and stale because they derive their highest inspiration from nothing more elevating than the daily papers.

A common knowledge of a good book may be at once the foundation of mutual understanding and friendship. It establishes a bond of sympathy between

minds cultivated and informed by contact with noble thoughts. Such sympathy is impossible for those whose minds owing to lack of reading dwell ever in the present amid material things.

Do not content yourself with reading the observations of others; be an observer yourself. Your reading should teach you to observe, but some persons stultify themselves so by constant reading that they lose the power to perceive. Our minds grow by exertion rather than by passive reception. We are put in the world not only to accomplish a certain amount of work, but also to develop our mental and spiritual powers to the fullest extent; to make the most of ourselves.

By taking an interest in what is going on around us we may add a new charm to life. We are surrounded by the wonderful and inspiring but only the great man or woman has the sense to see it; for all the rest life is hopelessly commonplace. The man who finds the most to admire gets the most enjoyment out of life. The study of nature teaches us to appreciate much that is beautiful in literature, and, on the other hand, books help us

to enjoy many things about us that otherwise we should not have noticed. Men with finer faculties than ourselves have observed and recorded for us beauties that without their aid we should have been unable to perceive. "Books," said Dryden, "are spectacles to read nature."

The power of a book to stimulate the mind is one of its most useful qualities. Some books are more valuable for what they make us think than for what they actually say. It is the reading that we make the most of, whose substance incorporates itself with our mental equipment, that develops and enlarges our faculties. What we read and assimilate becomes part of the character. Rousseau's *Emile*, for instance, is one of the most suggestive books ever written; Pestalozzi, Froebel, Herbert Spencer and many other educational thinkers have derived their inspiration from Rousseau. Emerson is especially valuable for the new trains of thought which he suggests. Furthermore a book is far from useless when it arouses thoughtful dissent. Passages in the *Emile* have furnished the texts for discussions

that have marked advances in educational thought.

We form our characters from the men and books that we associate with. We cannot always choose our companions but we can choose our books, and it is our own fault if they are mean books. A man may be known better by the books he reads than by the company he keeps, we should be quite as likely to find a judge making a companion of a pickpocket or gambler as to find a low-minded man reading an essay by Lowell or Emerson. Tell me what you read and I will tell you what you are. It is what we take an interest in that stamps us.

Matthew Arnold gives a concise definition of culture when he says that it is "to know the best that has been thought and said in the world," and he makes this idea clearer by saying "culture is reading, but reading with a purpose to guide it and with system." He elsewhere states, "Culture is a study of the perfection which consists in becoming something rather than in having something, in an inward condition of the mind and spirit, not in an outward set of circumstances."

Self-activity is called by Sir William Hamilton the primary principle of education. By lovingly reading the best books we may go on, year after year, giving ourselves a fuller education than can be gained in any university, because it is life long;—eternity long. Such an education requires time rather than money and any one who has the determination to improve himself, may like Sir William Jones “with the fortune of a peasant give himself the education of a prince.”

To read good books in a proper manner adds to life a charm whose infinite variety age cannot wither nor custom stale. It was Huxley, the man of science who said, “literature is the greatest of all sources of refined pleasure and one of the great uses of a liberal education is to enable us to enjoy that pleasure.” The gain is immense when we have learned to like the things that are improving rather than those that merely entertain. The remark of Samuel Royce that whenever intellectual pleasures are in the ascendant civilization progresses, and whenever sensual pleasures predominate civilization is on the wane, is as true of the indi-

vidual as of the race. The nations which have made an impression on history have done so by intellectual vigor and not by brute force. It is ideas not arms that determine destinies and books are the vehicle of ideas.

CHAPTER VI.

CLASSIFICATION OF BOOKS.

The multitude of books impresses on us the shortness of human life, and immortality never seems more desirable and necessary than in the presence of a library.

The national library of France contains about three million books and the British Museum requires forty miles of shelves to accommodate its two million volumes. The room which contains the card catalogue of the nine hundred thousand books of the Boston Public Library is as large as the entire space of many a village library.

According to the purposes for which they have been written books may be divided broadly into three classes. In the first place we have books intended to convey information. This class is very numerous as it includes histories, biographies, travels, text books and works on technical subjects.

The second class comprises those written to amuse, and consists mainly of works of fiction. This is also numerous, for it constitutes the chief mental nourishment of the greater number of readers. It is estimated that novels form fully three-fourths of the books issued by circulating libraries.

The last class is composed of books written to inspire, to which belong works of the sacred writers and of the great poets. Such books are comparatively few in number, but they include much of the noblest work of the noblest men whom the world has known.

These three divisions are not separated by hard and fast lines; Hawthorne's *Marble Faun*, for example, at once entertains, informs and inspires, while, fortunately for us all, the number of books that amuse and at the same time instruct is sufficient to supply pleasure and profit for the longest life and the most varied tastes.

There is of course still another class of books that are no books, works of this kind far outnumber all the others put together, and it requires constant care in order to avoid them.

"Throw away none of your time," says Lord Chesterfield, "upon those trivial futile books, published for the amusement of idle and ignorant readers; such sort of books swarm and buzz about one every day; flop them away,—they have no sting."

Ruskin calls attention to the difference between books written to render thought permanent such as great poems and histories, books of all time he calls them, and books written merely for the hour, the useful or pleasant talk of some person you cannot otherwise converse with, such as travels and novels which he says are not books at all but merely letters or newspapers in print.

"A book," he says, "is essentially not a talked thing, but a written thing; and written, not with the view of mere communication, but of permanence. The book of talk is printed only because its author cannot speak to thousands of people at once; if he could, he would—the volume is mere *multiplication* of his voice. You cannot talk to your friend in India; if you could, you would; you write instead; that is mere *conveyance* of voice. But a

book is written, not to multiply the voice merely, not to carry it merely, but to preserve it. The author has something to say which he perceives to be true and useful, or helpfully beautiful. In the sum of his life he finds this to be the thing, or group of things, manifest to him:—this is the piece of true knowledge, or sight, which his share of sunshine and earth has permitted him to seize. He would fain set it down forever; engrave it on rock, if he could; saying, ‘This is the best of me;this I saw and knew; this, if anything of mine, is worth your memory.’ That is his ‘writing’; it is, in his small human way, and with whatever degree of true inspiration is in him, his inscription, or scripture. That is a ‘Book’.”

DeQuincey has made a very famous division of books, which I quote at length because though often referred to, it is seldom seen in its entirety. He says: “There is the literature of knowledge and there is the literature of power. The function of the first is to *teach*; the function of the second is to *move*. The first is a rudder; the second, an oar or a sail.

The first speaks to the mere discursive understanding; the second speaks, ultimately it may happen, to the higher understanding or reason, but always through affections of pleasure and sympathy.

"Remotely, it may travel towards an object seated in what Lord Bacon calls *dry* light; but, proximately, it does and must operate, else it ceases to be a literature of *power*, on and through that *humid* light which clothes itself in the mists and glittering *iris* of human passions, desire and genial emotions.

"Men have so little reflected on the higher functions of literature, as to find it a paradox if one should describe it as a mean or subordinate purpose of books to give information. But this is a paradox only in the sense which makes it honorable to be paradoxical. Whenever we talk in ordinary language of seeking information, or gaining knowledge, we understand the words as connected with something of absolute novelty. But it is the grandeur of all truth, which *can* occupy a very high place in human interests, that it is never absolutely novel in the meanest

minds; it exists eternally by way of germ or latent principle in the lowest as in the highest, needing to be developed but never planted. To be capable of transplantation is the immediate criterion of a truth that ranges on a lower scale. Besides which, there is a rarer thing than truth, namely, power, or deep sympathy with truth. What is the effect, for instance, upon society, of children? By the pity, by the tenderness, and by the peculiar modes of admiration, which connect them selves with the helplessness, with the innocence, and with the simplicity of children, not only are the primal affections strengthened and continually renewed, but the qualities which are dearest in the sight of heaven—the frailty, for instance, which appeals to forbearance, the innocence which symbolizes the heavenly, and the simplicity which is most alien from the worldly, are kept up in perpetual remembrance, and their ideals are continually refreshed. A purpose of the same nature is answered by the higher literature, viz:—the literature of power.

“What do you learn from *Paradise Lost*? Nothing at all. What do you

learn from a cookery-book? Something new—something that you did not know before, in every paragraph. But would you therefore put the wretched cookery-book on a higher level of estimation than the divine poem? What you owe to Milton is not any knowledge, of which a million separate items are still but a million of advancing steps on the same earthly level; what you owe is *power*, that is exercise and expansion to your own latent capacity of sympathy with the infinite, where every pulse and each separate influx is a step upwards—a step ascending as upon a Jacob's ladder from earth to mysterious altitudes above the earth. *All* the steps of knowledge, from first to last, carry you further on the same plane, but could never raise you one foot above your ancient level of earth: whereas the very *first* step in power is a flight—is an ascending movement into another element where earth is forgotten."

The verdict of time is never wrong. Books that delighted generations of men have done so because of real merit and these are the books that have embodied the life thought of great men. Shallow

books no matter how brilliant they may be are short-lived. The best thoughts of the best men endure in books that are true to human experience irrespective of the century in which they were written. An author is great in proportion as he perceives the universally true in life.

The books which do us good are the sincere books, those which are true in the highest sense of the word which give noble and cheerful ideas of life, which make us respect human nature, books written by men who have a helpful message for their fellow strugglers.

There are books which mark epochs in the progress of the world just as the discovery of America and the invention of printing do, and the reading of a book sometimes marks an epoch in life. Great is the joy of meeting a real book by a thoughtful man. Keats wrote on first looking into Chapman's Homer:—

"Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken
Or like stout Cortes when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surprise—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien."

CHAPTER VII.

POETRY.

Poetry is the flower of literature, the most perfect utterance of the human mind in no other of his works does man so nearly approach the Divine, so that in every age the poet has been regarded as the inspired mouthpiece of God. The prophet was the forth teller not merely the foreteller and his message commanded attention and respect as coming from a power above the speaker. Whatever may be said to the contrary there still remains the fact that the greatest and noblest thoughts which have ever occupied the mind of man have found their highest and most permanent expression in poetry, the outward form of which differing from the language of daily life is at once the accompaniment and indication of the dignity of a great idea.

Wordsworth calls poetry the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge. To the question, "What is a poet?" he replies,

"He is a man speaking to men; a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive Soul than are supposed to be common among mankind. To these qualities he has added a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present."

Poetry is life crystalized into literature, its value is in its eternal truth, in its universal adaptation to the higher needs of our nature. It is because we find in poetry what we have observed but could not formulate for ourselves that it impresses us so deeply. George Eliot said of Wordsworth's poems, "I never before met with so many of my own feelings expressed just as I should like them." "There is some awe mixed with the joy of our surprise," wrote Emerson, "when this poet, who lived in some past world, two or three hundred years ago, says that which lies close to my own Soul, that which I also had well-nigh thought and said."

Lowell thought that the highest office of a great poet is to show us how much variety, freshness, and opportunity abides in the obvious and the familiar. Great poets have concentrated in their works the thought of an age. Gladstone says that the poems of Homer constitute a world of their own. "The study of him is not a mere matter of literary criticism, but is a full study of life in every one of its departments." Poetry has somewhat the same relation to prose that a landscape painted by Corot bears to a photograph of the same scene. It is truth idealized. The poets teach us to admire beauties in nature that we have often looked at but never perceived. If it were not for Scott few people would know of Loch Katrine.

There is just as beautiful scenery elsewhere, but we are waiting for the poets to show it to us.

Sometimes the poets compress their observations of life and of the working of the spirit of man into words which embody a great truth in a little space. "Jewels five words long that on the stretch'd forefinger of all Time sparkle forever." Often the poets produce an



impression or make a picture by the use of a single appropriate word, as when Tennyson says the cloud *smoulders* on the cliff. He is master of the art of calling up mental images by allusions to color, sound and smell, and he carefully chooses from his enormous vocabulary the exact word to produce the desired effect.

Lowell thought that the real literary genius stored up the apt or pleasing word, and Ruskin said, "he is the best poet who can by the fewest words touch the greatest number of secret chords of thought in his reader's own mind, and set them to work in their own way."

The inspiration and delight derived from familiarity with the best poetry is one of the most precious results of culture. More than any other work of man poetry helps us to cherish the ideal and we look to our ideals to counteract the hardness of our daily life, to strengthen and uplift us. To read a great poet for a few minutes every day raises one out of the commonplace. Matthew Arnold, who was one of the hardest worked men of his time, used to read a hundred lines

or more of the *Odyssey* before he went to bed. He said that "Good poetry does undoubtedly tend to form the Soul and character; it tends to beget a love of beauty and of truth in alliance together; it suggests however indirectly high and noble principles of action, and it inspires the emotions helpful in making principles operative, and he added, "We have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us."

It is one of the fortunate miracles of literature that so much of the very best poetry is also within the comprehension of the humblest understanding. Many of the poems which have been the delight and consolation of men of the greatest mental capacities have also the power to encourage and uplift those of far lower abilities. The *Psalms of David*, for example, have heights and depths which have made them the inspiration of men of all classes in all ages. Progress in the understanding of the poets is the result of reading which, beginning with those that are easiest to comprehend, goes on with increasing power to those, who, like Wordsworth, are philosophical and deep and those, who, like

Browning present particular difficulties the overcoming of which is rewarded by a vast wealth of inspiring thought.

Matthew Arnold, who speaks with authority on these subjects says, "Constantly in reading poetry a sense of the best, the really excellent, and of the strength and joy to be drawn from it, should be present in our minds, and should govern our estimate of what we read." and he remarks of the poet that, "if he is a real classic, if his work belongs to the class of the very best (for this is the true and right meaning of the word, *classic*, *classical*), then the great thing for us is to feel and enjoy his work as deeply as ever we can, and to appreciate the wide difference between it and all work which has not the same high character. This is what is salutary, this is what is formative, this is the great benefit to be got from the study of poetry."

It is not to be expected that at the first reading you can see all the beauties that a word-painter like Tennyson spent years in elaborating. A masterpiece cannot be read too carefully nor too often. To appreciate a great picture like the

Sistine Madonna, you must return to it again and again and let its gracious sweetness sink into your soul. It is so that you must study a great poem.

Hence it follows naturally that there is great culture value in storing the memory with noble poems. While we should not go so far as to say with Ruskin that no poetry is worth reading which is not worth learning by heart, there is an inspiration in adorning our minds with as much as we can learn accurately from the great poets; and this inspiration is derived especially from the poetry we have known and loved in youth, which has, from its very associations, a strength and sweetness that no other can have.

"Many a noble poem," says Henry Pancoast, "early acquired by a pure effort of the memory and at first but dimly understood, has gradually worked its way into the hidden depths of a child's conscious life, revealing its full power and beauty only by slow degrees, and elevating, quickening, and enlarging his spirit in secrecy and in silence."

Poetry as the truest expression of the life and morals of an age is at once a pro-

phesy and a history. A prophecy as indicating that to which the nation would aspire—a history as a record of the fact of past aspiration, Concrete individual fact has little significance to poetry except as the manifestation of an idea or of a universal truth.—The poet is the embodiment of his age and his era and a full understanding of his poetry gives us an insight into the very heart of them.

CHAPTER VIII.

BIOGRAPHY.

Great poetry is the expression of the spiritual life, not of the poet merely, but of the poet in his capacity of forth-teller of what is divine and universal in human life. History deals with the life and actions and motives of men in a particular age and treats of human achievements and relations, and of their causes and effects. Both Poetry and History are in a sense impersonal, being concerned not so much with individuals as such, as with the ideals toward which or the ideas with which men live their lives and do their work. It is biography to which we turn for the most intimate and detailed personal knowledge of a particular great man who may have been the poet whose lines have met response in every heart or the writer whose mind has guided a nation. As dealing with life itself biography may well be regarded as one of the important divisions of literature. It

may be and usually is found to belong in both classes, the literature of knowledge, and the literature of power. There is a directness about a great biography that causes us to feel personally acquainted with the subject of it.

"The great man," says Carlyle, "does in good truth, belong to his own age—nay, more so than any other man; being properly the synopsis and epitome of such age with its interests and influences; but belongs likewise to all ages, otherwise he is not great. What was transitory in him passes away and an immortal part remains, the significance of which is in strict speech inexhaustible—as that of every *real* object is. Aloft, conspicuous, on his enduring basis, he stands there, serene, unaltering; silently addresses to every new generation a new lesson and monition. Well is his life worth writing, worth interpreting; and ever, in the new dialect of new times, of rewriting and re-interpreting;" and he adds, "as the highest Gospel was a Biography, so is the Life of every good man still an indubitable Gospel."

There is an obvious similarity between the biography of a great man by a great man and the portrait of a great man by a great artist. The National Portrait Gallery in London makes real to us the men who have been England's glory in peace and war. No one can leave it after looking on the faces of Gladstone and Tennyson and Sir John Franklin and the hundreds of others who scorned delights and lived laborious days without having a higher estimate of humanity and being nerved to new efforts, and we may obtain the same effect in a more detailed manner by reading the best biographies.

The number of great men who are alive at any one time is small, and they are too much occupied to see any but those who have important business with them, but we may study them at our leisure in their biographies, and go over the events of years in a few hours.

A knowledge of the life of an author always adds interest to the perusal of his books and is frequently of value in explaining them. The study of the noble life in connection with the works of the noble

mind is one of the best foundations for liberal culture. Consider the influence of an acquaintance with the entire works of Longfellow or Lowell, read in connection with the life of the former by his brother, or with the biography of the latter by Scudder. To know the atmosphere which surrounded such men, the things towards which their interest went out, the sources from which they drew their inspiration, the way in which the common experiences of life, so familiar to us all grew beautiful under their poetic imagination; a familiarity with all these things will elevate a man's whole life.

The light too which is thrown by biography on the conduct of life is very great. Theory, philosophizing, opinions, reasoning, are of little worth when compared with the actual facts of the life of a man who has attained distinction in any department of human achievement. Reading of this kind teaches us that chance is only to a small extent an element of success, that nothing is attained by the brightest minds without that infinite patience and labor which in itself is genius. To think of the brave way in which such men met

the trials that they were called upon to endure is a most healthful remedy for warped and selfish ideas of life.

Take the life of Scott by Lockhart; note the domestic tastes of the author of *Waverly*, his kindly interest in the humblest persons around him, the heroic way in which he nerved himself to meet single-handed the overwhelming catastrophe of the failure of Constable, the way in which, while struggling with physical weaknesses that would have rendered another conscious only of his own sufferings, he retained his simplicity and gentle thoughtfulness for others,—all these lessons may be learned from that noble biography.

We should take a sympathetic interest in the lives of high-minded men, and note how in spite of obstacles and failures they have accomplished their purposes and how some have been great because they nobly tried and in spite of the fact that they nobly failed. Nothing is more helpful than to see that our ills are not peculiar to ourselves, but that others have overcome the same difficulties that are perplexing us.

Biography teaches us to look at life from many points of view. In reading biography, said Dr. Andrew Peabody, "I find myself translating a life unlike what mine can ever be into terms of my own life, shaping from it analogies, equivalents, and parallels for my own aims and endeavors, studying modes of embodying its underlying principles in forms, it may be of which he whose experience suggests them could never have dreamed."

Learn to make a distinction between the essential and fundamental characteristics of a great man and such gossip details as what he had for breakfast and how he wore his hair. "It is the great error of thoughtless biographers," says Ruskin, to attribute to the accident which introduces some new phase of character, all the circumstances of character which gave the accident importance."

When a great man has written the story of his own life the result is a book of double value. Emerson and George Eliot agreed in considering the *Confessions of Rousseau* the most interesting book they had ever read. *Franklin's Autobiography* is a model of keen and accurate observation

76 *How to Make the Most of Books*

expressed in the clearest and simplest language.

Boswell's Life of Johnson is commonly considered the best biography in the language. Of this and *Lockhart's Scott* Phillips Brooks says that they are "worthy to be read and re-read, and read again by all men who want to keep their manhood healthy, broad and brave, and true."

CHAPTER IX.

HISTORY.

The object of history is to tell us not only what happened but the causes and results of what happened, and this leads the historian into almost every field of human interest. He deals, to be sure, with facts, as far as he is able to ascertain them, but his generalizations and interpretations of facts are an important part of his work. The historian must abandon prejudice, preconception and predilection of every kind. He must deal with the people, their ideas, development and social movements as well as with the incidents of war and foreign relations and the actions and influence of great men whose agency in shaping the progress of events is often over-estimated.

As everything which passes through the human mind is necessarily colored more or less by the particular mind through which it passes, we find that the history of the same people during the same period

will not seem in all respects to be identical when presented by different historians. Macaulay and Carlyle, each of whom wrote history with extraordinary brilliancy, present to us pictures of the times of which they wrote that for interest are wonderful but for accuracy are in many respects less valuable than the histories written by authors of less ability.

Psychologists tell us that the chief use of the study of history is to train the judgment. It has other uses, however, which while not so essential from the viewpoint of the psychologist, are important in their bearing on the development of the individual. The breadth of view which comes from a knowledge of the relations of men in another period or land helps us in the understanding of the affairs of our own nation or community in our own day. Human struggles, achievements or even failures must ever interest the thoughtful man and the rise, progress and decline or success of great movements in another age enables us to judge intelligently of similar or other movements going on about us. Narrowness and bigotry will ever exist even among men who are in intention

perfectly sincere and honest, but the man who is narrow and bigoted in regard to any subject because of ignorance of history or unwillingness to ascertain the full facts is dishonest to himself. History is one of the most enlightening of studies and its effect upon daily conduct if rightly viewed may be such as to lead men to a wider and fuller application of the Golden Rule. In fact much of what the historian is called upon to record has a direct relation to the Golden Rule or rather to the frequent failure of men to observe it. To the devout mind the working of God in history is clearly shown, and the downfall of nations may be traced in many instances to a decline in religious earnestness and to a consequent lowering of moral standards.

The thought that human history from the beginning has been one continuous and progressive whole without a break or intermission of any kind is an idea for the clear expression and emphasizing of which we are greatly indebted to Thomas Arnold. The histories of Greece and Rome are our histories, for from them has come the glorious heritage of thought

and social organization which we have in their literature and in Roman law. All facts in history are in some way related, though we often lose the connection through ignorance of intervening facts or events, or through lack of knowledge of even whole centuries of human life and struggle.

The *Old Testament* regarded as actual human history is a series of documents pulsating with the very life and heart-beats of real men. It is no dry theology or book apart from great movements of mankind. It is the living record of one part of our race. History interprets for us the present and enables us to predict the future. It shows that there are laws which govern human relationships and that a knowledge of these laws will enable us to judge what is likely to come to pass. A study of the method pursued by the men who have written great histories reveals to us the diligence of investigation, the labor to secure accuracy, the care to be impartial observers that must characterize the writers of history as we now understand it. An important part of the work of a modern historian consists

in weighing and interpreting the statements of writers of long ago who are often the only source we have of information concerning the things of which they wrote. No source of information is to be ignored. An inscription on a coin may unfold a story to the patient searcher for historical knowledge; an Etruscan tomb may modify our understanding of a passage of early Roman history; a visit to the scene of one of Caesar's battles may give us an entirely different idea of the great general's account of it.

John Fiske said that "The real history of a people includes everything about them and is therefore an aggregate of innumerable facts. It is impossible and undesirable to present all these facts or a millionth part of them and so history must be a selection from infinite details. Historic facts are not of equal value and the historian fixes upon those only which he thinks will help him show the greater features of a people's origin, rise, progress and vicissitudes. It is desirable to have at command the more important facts of history, but the most precious thing history has to offer may be missed by one

who is chiefly employed in memorizing it. When history is viewed as an assemblage of unrelated facts, conquering it naturally takes the form of committing it to memory. When it is looked upon as a development—a chain of causes and effects—it appeals more directly to the reason and the understanding. Most of history we must forget, but we should strive to retain something of interest in reading history, something of power in following up a line of ordinary investigation, something of a disposition to seek for the underlying causes of events, something of a grasp of the mightier tendencies and movements of history that makes it a teacher of the present out of the wealth of its past."

History as contained in the biographies of representative men is both delightful and profitable reading. Montaigne tells us that "the only good histories are those that are written by such as commanded or were imploid themselves in weighty affaires or that were partners in the conduct of them, or that at least have had the fortune to manage others of like qualitie."

Our literature is especially rich in biographies and autobiographies of men prominent in American history, such as Washington, Franklin and Lincoln, and in personal memoirs such as those of Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, Johnston and Longstreet. The accounts of the Civil War by the Northern and Southern commanders form a valuable exercise of the judgment for they show how honorable men may look at a question from different points of view. Such reading should teach self reliance and confidence as well as modesty and fairmindedness. One should first read a short and reliable book, and, after he has obtained a knowledge of the course of events, expand it by reading longer works and by making a comparison of authorities. Study the history of our own country, but do not forget that it cannot be perfectly understood without studying that of other countries and especially that of England. Students of history consider that Roman history unites the ancient world to the modern; French history is the story of civilization from the twelfth to the eighteenth century, European history centres in French history.

We may sometimes get an excellent idea of history from a historical novel such as *The Virginians* or *The Scarlet Letter*, for such works give us a picture of social conditions of the times with great historical characters appearing usually, if at all, in the background or setting of the story.

CHAPTER X.

FICTION.

Fiction which includes two closely related forms, the novel or romance and the drama, has two functions; the more important being the interpreting and reflecting of life, the holding of the mirror up to nature, as Hamlet called it, and the giving of pleasure as a result of the presentation.

The romance which may be in the form of a novel or of a drama differs from the ordinary novel as chiefly in dealing with the unusual and improbable, including the supernatural. The novel performs to-day a great part of what the drama performed practically alone in the days of Elizabeth and James.

The close relation of the drama and the novel is seen in the fact that the same story may be told in both forms and it is common to-day to see a successful novel presented as a drama on the stage while on the other hand, novels have sometimes been written from plays.

The novel and the drama are classed as fiction because they present pictures that are usually not representations of actual fact, but no novel or drama is worthy of consideration which is untrue to what might happen in human life or to the great essential truths of human relationships. This is not a distinction between moral and immoral novels and dramas, for an immoral book may be true to facts in human experience, but they are the facts of pathological conditions and not of health.

An immoral book is one in which vice is made attractive and evil is condoned and unpunished. The Elizabethan drama never made vice triumphant and the sinner always was made to pay the just penalty for his sin. The drama of the Restoration, narrower in human interest than that of the Elizabethans, differed from the latter notably in the attitude towards vice; sacred relationships were matters of jest by the dissolute courtiers and their followers and vice was objectionable only when found out. When our ideas of right and wrong are confused and our conceptions of morality undermined by a

book, it is to be avoided, for it can only do us harm. No good book ever makes sin respectable though it may of necessity present scenes in which disreputable characters appear; one of the greatest examples of this is *Vanity Fair*.

Keener observers than we are, who saw deeper into the inner workings of human nature have described in novels the operations and consequences of love, hate, avarice, revenge and other emotions which are always likely to move the heart. It is therefore of the utmost importance that when we read fiction we should read none except that written by masters who really did understand the soul of man, for when we read books by inferior observers we get warped and false ideas. In giving impressions of life the novel possesses a great advantage over biography, because, out of respect for the memory of the dead and the feelings of the living, the tendency of biography is to omit or to subdue harsh experiences, so that books like the *Confessions of Rousseau* which describe the deepest workings and weaknesses of the heart of a real man are exceedingly rare.

Treating of imaginary characters, the novelist may describe what he actually sees without fear of hurting the feelings of anyone. The tendency of many novels to conventionalize life and to express in set phrases the tenderest emotions is another reason why we should read no fiction but that which is true to life. We may occasionally be obliged to read for information a book written by an inferior author but there is no excuse for reading any novels but those of the highest class. We should question fiction sharply as to its effect upon our natures; if it does not have a wholesome and uplifting influence, no amount of interest that it possesses should entitle it to consideration.

When you read fiction read that written by the masters, like Scott, Dickens, Thackeray and George Eliot. Read the great novels that the judgment of the world has pronounced of permanent value but do not form one of the large class whose chief inspiration is derived from the last new novel. The new book that every one is talking about will probably be forgotten in six months but *Ivanhoe*, *Henry Esmond*, *David Copperfield*, and *Romola* will last

as long as the English language. There are some classic stories like *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels* and *The Arabian Nights* to which constant reference is made and with which every educated person is expected to be familiar.

To keep up with the flood of modern fiction is impossible. There is a great gain if we can find amusement in reading books which inform as well as entertain. Prefer fact to fiction. Few are indifferent to the pathos of Dickens and Thackeray but there is a chord touched in reading of the actual heroism of brave men and women which no imaginary character can affect so strongly. When we read poor DeLong's record, in the midst of that terrible Arctic winter on the *Jeanette*, "for myself, I am doing all I can to make myself trusted and respected, and I think I succeed, I try to be gentle but firm in correcting anything I see wrong, and always calm and self-possessed." we are moved by a real human sympathy. Yet it is one of the miracles of the masters of fiction that they make their characters so real to us. Lowell said he knew the sound of Squire Weston's voice; and for

many people Baker Street, London, is more definite as a landmark as the residence of the imaginary Sherlock Holmes than of the real Mrs. Siddons.

CHAPTER XI.

LIBRARIES AND THE CARE OF BOOKS.

We do not get the most out of a book unless we own it; we cannot take a personal interest in borrowed books, and, although it pleases Mr. Augustine Birrell to think of the thousands of thumbs that have turned over its pages with delight, it is difficult really to know a library book with its soiled pages, battered cover and the date when it must be returned impending like the Day of Judgment.

There is the same difference between a book that you own and a library book that there is between a home and a hotel; the one is stamped with the individuality of its owner, the other is common property. It is pleasant to have a feeling of proprietorship in the great men of the past and to speak of *my* Homer or *my* Shakespeare. How close it brings us to a man when we possess a book with his

autograph or book-plate in it, or which, better still, he has read and marked. If for instance, we owned Lowell's *Don Quixote* with the notes written on its margin in repeated readings from which he drew the material for his famous address, what an inspiration it would be.

The books that you skim you may borrow. if you buy them they will take up room on your shelves that may be more profitably employed; but the books that you wish to read again and again, to ponder over and to study you must own.

You may have a library full of books, but what you really are is determined by that part of them which you have read and laid to heart. Yet the unconscious tuition of books has a real value, we learn to love them by having them about us. Merely to surround ourselves with great books and with the portraits of those who have written them has a refining influence as constant as it is unnoticed. That the essay of Emerson or the poem of Longfellow is where you can lay your hand on it, that the kindly faces of the writers look down on you from the wall, associa-

tions such as these sweeten and elevate life.

Although there is a luxurious beauty about an elegant edition that is not to be lightly esteemed, there is a satisfaction in knowing that we can derive as much food for thought from a cheap Shakespeare as from a first folio. The truest book-lovers are those who love the thoughts that the books contain. Complete editions of standard authors are the best to own. The print should be large and the books easy to hold and to open. If edited at all, the work should be done by a competent scholar. It takes a great deal of editing to spoil a classic, but nowadays there is too much editing, too much thinking is done for us.

Dr. Johnson thought that books that you may carry to the fire and hold readily in your hand are the most useful.

The durability of the letter as well as the spirit of a book is nowadays too often disregarded. Publishers recognize how much a striking exterior has to do with the sale of a book and pay more attention to making it attractive than durable. In former times men had more

respect for books. The vellum bound volumes of three hundred years ago will be in good condition long after the books of to-day have come to pieces and been thrown away.

If it be true that the degree of civilization of a people may be measured by its respect for its dead, it is no less true that the refinement of a household may be estimated by its care for its books. Some men of letters, however, have been remarkable for their ill-treatment of books. The poet Young turned down the leaf where there was a passage that interested him, so that many of his books would not shut. Voltaire noted his likes and dislikes in books with little regard to whether they belonged to him or not, while Coleridge said you might as well turn a bear into a tulip garden as let Wordsworth loose in your library; and in his *Literary Reminiscences* DeQuincey records a story which makes every book-lover shudder, that Wordsworth cut pages of Burke with a knife that had been used to butter toast.

Mr. Spofford gives some admirable directions for the care of books. One

should never draw books out from the shelf by their head-bands, or by pulling at the binding, but by placing the finger firmly on the top of the book, next to the binding and pressing down while drawing out the volume. Do not wedge books tightly together; do not pile them on top of each other; do not lay open books down upon their faces, or place weights upon open books. Books should be kept dry, but not too warm; if moist they mildew, if too warm they warp. No sensible person would press plants in any book of value. Do not mark the place by cards or letters. It weakens the binding. Use thin paper. Do not touch the engravings in books. Remember that even clean hands may soil dusty books. Those who follow the injunction of the *Prayer Book* to read and mark should be sure that they do so in their own books only. The suggestion not to wet the fingers in turning the leaf would seem needless did not observation show that there are persons with whom this clownish custom still obtains.

A private library should be a growth. It marks the stages of progress of the mind of its owner; no other property that

a man leaves behind him shows what he really was so fully as his books.

There are few hobbies a man can adopt from which as much enjoyment and instruction may be derived as from the gradual acquisition of a lot of books on some subject of special interest. Emerson's advice "buy in the line of your genius" is weighty and should be heeded. A man of moderate means may gradually get together a more complete collection on his specialty than the richest man could secure at short notice, and his satisfaction in the growth of such a library can never be experienced by the wealthy book collector who employs others to do the work for him. All that is needed is steady attention to buying such books, as opportunity presents itself. Many of the rarest and most valuable works cannot be procured on demand and must be bought when found, or the chance of securing them is gone, perhaps forever.

The gathering of such a collection may be made an education in itself, and instead of leaving his books to be scattered at his death, as has been the fate of so many libraries, a prudent man would

provide that they should be kept together and given to a permanent library. Many an institution would be glad to add to a good private collection on a particular subject its own books on the subject and make a memorial alcove to the donor which would prove a far more sensible monument than a shaft in the cemetery. Now that men have learned to respect books public libraries are as nearly immortal as any human institution can be. A great library is the only human institution that can take all knowledge for its province. Such libraries are mines from which knowledge may be quarried, and where the ideas of the past may be adapted to the needs of the present.

In a collection of books on the same subject each adds value to the other. Many libraries are an ill-assembled throng as useless as the vast army of Darius.

There is such a thing as an embarrassment of riches. If you have too many books about you, you may be bewildered so that you do not read to advantage. "Successful work," said Lowell, "is the result of a due proportion between the task and the instrument. Southey, whose

literary industry was so remarkable within the range of his own library, said 'that he never should have accomplished anything, if his energies had been buried under the vast stores of the British Museum.' "

As a workshop the public library may supplement, but it can rarely take the place of the private library. DeQuincey said that for mere purposes of study your own library is far preferable to the Bodleian or the Vatican, and Emerson thought that the best of the Harvard University library was in his study at home. That was the best for his own use, because when a man is working in a special line of thought he accumulates in time a collection of books on that subject that is more complete than any but the largest library can supply, and he can work with more facility with books that are familiar to him and ready to his hand. Emerson's books, however, would have been of little use to a Civil Engineer or to an American Historian, while a public library must provide for the needs of all students in whatever lines of research. But Emerson was under constant indebtedness to the Harvard library, in fact, that noble collection of

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books has played no small part in the literary development of Boston as well as of the great University. "The true University of these days," said Carlyle, "is a collection of books, and all education is to teach us how to read." * * * * *

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